

Dear Family & Friends of the Wolfpack,

Please know that as I write this, your husbands, sons, and fathers in the company are doing great things for the US Army and the people of Iraq. I'm proud of what we have accomplished in just a few short weeks and I hope that you all share that same feeling.

Current Operations: The company has finally settled into normal operations. Most of us live on an Iraqi Army compound adjacent to FOB Iskanderiah where we eat, sleep, and work every day with an entire battalion of Iraqi infantrymen. Second platoon lives and works on FOB Kalsu with majority of our US battalion. FOB Iskanderiah and FOB Kalsu are fairly close to each other, so the 1SG and I are able to travel between the two checking on our Soldiers regularly.

We do live and work in a dangerous area. Every day US and Iraqi Soldiers across the entire country come into contact with the terrorists who are trying derail the democratic process here. In most situations, the superior training, equipment, and discipline of our men allow them to prevail. Unfortunately though, as many of you already know, the enemy has occasionally caused casualties among our ranks. The battalion lost two Soldiers to IEDs a few days after Christmas. While we mourn the loss of our brothers in the headquarters company, the tragic events of the past have only strengthened our resolve to succeed and take care of each other when in harm's way.

The number one cause of US and Coalition casualties has been improvised explosive devices (IEDs). We are giving 100% effort every day to overcoming this threat and capturing or killing those responsible for planting IEDs. The counter-IED effort is so important, in fact, that the company's second platoon—ably led by 1LT Hibbitts and SSG Morin—has become the battalion's route clearance team. Their job is to search out and destroy IEDs before they can go off harming innocent people or Coalition Soldiers. They have been well-equipped with the latest technology the Army can give them. They do their job in bomb-resistant vehicles and have detection equipment that allows them to find IEDs without having to put Soldiers inside the blast radius of each device. The platoon just returned from an intensive week-long training course near Baghdad where they learned the most recent techniques on how to defeat the enemy's IEDs. We will be getting more training and equipment in the future.

Other than taking away their freedom to plant IEDs, there is another way to defeat terrorists in Iraq: train the Iraqi Army and police forces to take over the country's security needs. This is what the remainder of the company does every day on FOB Iskanderiah. We have become a Military Transition Team (MiTT) with the job making the Iraqi Army into a more effective fighting force. As I wrote above, we do everything with our partner Iraqi battalion. We eat the same food—it's actually quite good—and live in similar barracks. Every day headquarters platoon, first platoon, and assault & obstacle section work with their Iraqi counterparts to make them more successful in this war on terror.

To the Iraqi Army's credit, their Soldiers are motivated and dedicated to the cause. It's important to remember that they have more at stake in this war than we do. We can look forward to going home in about a year; the Iraqi Soldiers will spend the rest of their lives here. Terrorists

can—and have in the past—threaten their families. Thus far, it has been a pleasure to work with the Iraqi Army. We look forward to helping them take back their country from insurgent terrorists.

Morale Monitors: There are a number of reasons that make American Soldiers effective fighters. Having good training, equipment, and leadership is not always enough. Morale plays a huge role in our men's ability to do their jobs. Because this is so important, I've specifically requested the senior NCOs in the company to watch our guys very carefully and alert me to any problems that I might not have noticed. From what I have seen so far, the company's morale is good. There's always room for a little improvement, but the only way to have perfect morale for this deployment is to end early and have all of us return home tomorrow. Our duties here obviously prevent that—although everyone agrees that it would be nice.

Unlike most other FOBs in Iraq, we have 24/7 internet access available right in the company area and our guys take good advantage of the opportunity. There are telephones and more internet connections available in MWR tents on both American FOBs. We get the military's newspaper, the Stars and Stripes, pretty regularly. We also have our own company gym with free weights and a day room with satellite television and AFN TV.

Mid-tour leave will be starting soon. We're going to do our best to give everyone an opportunity to get two weeks of leave from Iraq. While 1SG Dean has made every effort to distribute the leave dates fairly, not everyone can go right at the 6 month mark of the deployment. Some have to go early and others will get their leave late. Regardless of when your Soldier gets to take leave, though, it should be a great opportunity for rest and relaxation with family and friends.

Permanent Mailing Address: I originally put out the following as a temporary mailing address. I later found out that we will keep this address for the duration of the deployment. Mail seems to arrive fairly quickly—most letters and packages get to the intended recipient in 10-12 days.

Congratulations are in order: I'm very pleased to announce that four out of the company's specialists recently got promoted to sergeant. Please congratulate SGT Jarrie, SGT Monythot, SGT Vandewalle, and SGT Velasquez when you get the chance. The Monythot's also should be congratulated on the birth of their second child, a boy named Hakoch in early January.

We have friends in Waco: The Duty family of Poppa Rolla's Pizza in Waco, TX has very generously 'adopted' the company's Soldiers for deployment. They have enlisted the help of other businesses in the area to sponsor the company, and I heartily thank them for their support. If you ever find yourselves in the Waco area, please stop in and thank them in person.

On the Horizon: Now that we have settled into normal operations, you can expect your Soldiers to be doing more of the same. We will continue to train the Iraqi Army and seek out IEDs and their makers. As I think I've told you before, six weeks ago I challenged our junior leaders to make sure that we get better every day. They have taken up that challenge and ensure that we are learning & improving each day. I look forward to our continued success and improvement in the months to come.

Finally, I'd like to thank each one of you again for your support of the Wolfpack's Soldiers. Everyone knows that a Soldier depends on his support structure back home, and I know that your loved ones are grateful for all that you do for them. Your kind thoughts and prayers are always appreciated. I know that your Soldiers have the same best hopes for all of you back home.

Best wishes,

James Cook
CPT, EN
Commanding